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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2053  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7052  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 8197  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5528  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0824  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 3038  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9879  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 3267  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 5736  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0920  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2136  
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RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0441  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001842

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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN'S UPCOMING ELECTIONS, PART 1: STABILITY  
PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE

REF: ISLAMABAD 1490 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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11. (U) Pakistan's upcoming general elections -- expected to occur in late 2007 or early 2008 -- are a topic of frequent conversation and speculation among the country's elite, media, and international community (including recent U.S. Congressional delegations). When Pakistanis go to the polls they will elect members of the National and Provincial Assemblies -- not the President. The elections will be an important test of President Musharraf's stated goal of strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions. Building public trust will be a crucial component of the process. This is the first in a series of cables describing preparations for Pakistan's elections. End Summary.

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National and Provincial Assemblies:  
Completion of Terms Will Be A First  
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12. (U) Pakistanis will go to the polls later this year or early next year to elect 342 members of the National Assembly and 483 members of the four Provincial Assemblies (Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier, and Balochistan Provinces). Under the constitution, Assembly members are elected directly in a constituency-based, first-past-the-post (winner takes all) system except for special seats reserved for women and non-Muslims. Women and non-Muslims fill reserved seats according to a proportional, party list system based on the number of general seats won by their party. (Note: Pakistan's

upper house of parliament, the Senate, consists of 100 members. Except for specially appointed representatives from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the Capital Area, Senators are elected indirectly by the Provincial Assemblies. Senators serve staggered six-year terms, and elections are to be held every three years. The next election -- which will replace half of the Senate -- is due in 2009. End Note.)

13. (U) Pakistan's constitution mandates five-year terms for the National and Provincial Assemblies, but historically, Pakistan's Assemblies have been weak institutions. During the 1990's alone, the National and Provincial Assemblies were dissolved four times before President Musharraf suspended them in 1999. Musharraf frequently observes as a point of pride that the current National and Provincial Assemblies will be the first in Pakistan's history to complete their five-year term. The current National Assembly's term began November 16, 2002. All but one of the Provincial Assemblies also began in November 2002. Sindh Provincial Assembly, the last to convene, began its term in December 2002.

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How the President Will (Probably) Be Elected  
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14. (U) The Legal Framework Order of 2002 -- promulgated by Musharraf but later incorporated into the Constitution via the 17th Amendment in 2003 -- changed the electoral schedule for the National and Provincial Assemblies. Instead of holding elections before the end of their term, the amended schedule calls for elections to be held within 60 days after

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the expiration of their term. This means that elections should be scheduled sometime between November 15, 2007 and January 15, 2008.

15. (U) The Legal Framework Order did not change the schedule for Presidential elections, however. When a President's term is set to expire, the Constitution calls for the Chief Election Commissioner to convene an Electoral College composed of both houses Parliament and the Provincial Assemblies to elect a President no earlier than 60 days and no later than 30 days before the expiration of the President's term. President Musharraf's term is set to expire on November 15, which means that the Electoral College should convene sometime between September 15 and October 15.

16. (U) According to the new constitutional schedule, Musharraf will stand for re-election as president using the current Assemblies unless he dissolves them before the presidential election is due. Opposition parties have criticized Musharraf for this state of affairs, claiming that possibly not allowing the new Assemblies to choose a new President goes against the spirit of the constitution. Had the old Constitutional schedule been in place, Musharraf definitely would have stood for re-election using the newly elected Assemblies. Critics call the possible new schedule a "fraud on the Constitution," claiming that the constitutional process itself was subverted with the passage of the controversial 17th Amendment. (Note: On the other hand, since no Assembly in Pakistan's history as a republic has ever finished its five-year term, the old constitutional schedule had never been exercised. End Note.)

17. (U) No date has yet been announced for the presidential election, but Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and other government officials have indicated repeatedly to the press, including as recently as April 22, that Musharraf will seek re-election from the current Assemblies.

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The Challenge: Gaining Public Trust  
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18. (C) Comment: On at least one score, President Musharraf

has already succeeded in his declared goal of strengthening democratic institutions. By allowing the Assemblies to complete their five-year terms Musharraf has provided enough stability to allow the international community to work with the government, political parties, and civil society to plan for and run better parliamentary elections. Subsequent cables will describe these activities -- and inherent challenges -- in more detail.

19. (C) Comment, cont.: The most recent International Republican Institute-sponsored poll in February/March 2007 indicated that most people surveyed (82 percent) said they would vote if elections for the National Assembly were held next week. The survey also showed -- not for the first time -- that the Election Commission of Pakistan held the second lowest institutional approval rating in Pakistan (47 percent). For the next round of general elections to be deemed credible, this percentage will have to increase. This is a more challenging task, but improved government engagement with civil society, political parties, and ordinary people could go a long way toward building much-needed public trust. End Comment.

BODDE